**EnPOWER CoP**

**Thinking differently about women in leadership in HE?**

Thanks to everyone who joined the CoP today we had another really stimulating conversation which I have tried to capture in the notes below.

A lot of the conversation centered around ideas of ethics of care (Claire Gilligan) and emotional intelligence as important qualities for leaders that might be easier for women to incorporate into a alternative, possible distinctively female styles of leadership requiring different kinds of knowledge. This would of course involve challenging the idea that traditional ideas about good leadership have to include a degree of ruthlessness, the needs to create competition between staff and a certain emotional detachment from the leader – qualities that have been closely associated with masculine ideas around leadership qualities.

There was also a recognition that we need different types of language to describe alternative modes of leadership in the HE sector in job advertisements and staff evaluations for example.

We spoke of how social interactions in the workplace and the ability of leaders to create meaningful opportunities for connections and relationships are so important. We agreed it is important to value individuals even if we do not value or agree with the institutional structure within which they have to work in HE. In fact we came up with the idea of a leader as the ultimate connector, between team members and between the leader and team members. We touched on the need for an effective leader to have a positive vision about their teams performance rather than just seeing themselves as needing to judge and critique performance.

The influence of Confucian values in the Vietnamese HE context was raised and was clear that this engendered a working environment that valued respect and care and which paid attention to good working relationships. The significance of reputation was also discussed – not only in terms of one’s own profile but in the care one might take as a leader to ensure the reputation of one’s team, as a team as well as the individuals who are part of it.

Like last time, we talked of mindfulness and the needed for all workers to balance work and the other spheres of their life such as family and leisure activities. Again, we raised the questions of how this is often more important for women workers and by implication might be a bigger concern for female leaders, as women so often take on the bulk of caring /familial responsibilities.

Finally, we shared how happiness and pleasure are linked to the ability to stay strong and maintain resilience in one’s work and working relations. They can all be achieved through minute gestures ( which brings to mind Sara Ahmed’s equation ‘rolling eyes= feminist pedagogies’), relations ( a brief coffee with a colleague) and moments ( a student telling you how much your module has helped them) which – despite conditions in the HE sector that make our work difficult.

Across the group there is an interest in the group around feminist theories of leadership in HE which emphasise the affective complexities of neoliberal academia, for example by considering its ‘flights, fights and failure’ (Taylor and Lahad, 2018) and proposing strategies to address inherent sexism (Crimmins, 2019).

Examples of feminist strategies to challenge the status quo and essentially masculinist assumptions about leadership in HE include:

• Recognising the importance of relations with others/social interactions

• Building in collegial support for team members

• Creating flexibility/ability to work around other commitments in the workplace

• Female mentoring

• Changing how workspaces are configured and used

**Next Steps**

In the last part of the session Mandy outlined the idea that group could begin to work together to more permanently capture the moments, the relationships which constitute what Stewart (2011) calls ‘little random cases’ of the ordinary,

The creation of a **Collective biography** methodology would enable the CoP to collect and explore moments and stories taken from members’ everyday life as HE staff, either working as a leader (this could be a Department, course or module level) as well as our experiences of working under different leaders over the course of one’s career.

Using this methodology collectives, like the EnPOWER CoP, are able to work with their own memories around an agreed theme of common interest in this instance - female leadership in HE.

It is clear that collective biographies can promote changes in practice in academic labour and relations as their discussion forms a basis for critique and challenge.

Collecting stories about our experiences affords opportunities to share narratives of lived experience which becomes the focus of an academic exploration. This is because collective biographies allow for a critical interrogation of working atmospheres/environments which are ambiguous, always in movement, and involve many people, objects and encounters.

Our collective biography could also include various creative methodologies such as photo elicitation - where we create images as provocations writing about each other's images as well as our own – to illustrate and support our biographies and memories/experiences of female leadership. The CoP has already begun this with our initial Padlet photo elicitation which we could look to expand.

We could then use the images collectively to trigger more memories and stories of academic lives across the group.

This is an essentially a deterritorialising’ strategy (Gannon et al., 2012) which lessens our attachment to singular and individualized truths and, instead generates more collective ‘collective’ embodied and material detail in our writing.

**References /further reading**

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